



Foster Care Youth: Educational Waivers

Problems

- (1) **Foster care youth struggle with higher education-** Foster youth continue to lack opportunity and guidance in accessing postsecondary education. According to a report from the Colorado Evaluation and Action Lab, only 13.4% of Colorado foster youth who were in foster care beginning at age 13 entered postsecondary education by age 21.¹ There is a sizable disparity between this rate and the 55.8% of high school graduates overall who enroll in college, according to a report by the Colorado Department of Higher Education.² There are two main barriers to higher education for youth in foster care: first, the logistical burden of paying for college limits the accessibility of higher education for youth in foster care, as explained by a report from the Colorado Department of Education.³ Second, foster students cite a lack of support and consistency in environment as obstacles to achieving postsecondary education, according to a report from the Colorado Lab.⁴
- (2) **Educational Training Vouchers are Insufficient-** A national solution to address the accessibility of higher education to youth in foster care is the Federal Chaffee Educational Training Vouchers (ETVs) program, which provides up to \$5,000 of educational funds to foster students.⁵ However, these provide limited funding and are

¹ “Flattening the College Curve: Lessons Learned from Foster Care to Improve Postsecondary Participation for All Youth.” Colorado Evaluation and Action Lab, September 29, 2020.
<https://coloradolab.org/documents/flattening-the-college-curve-lessons-learned-from-foster-care-to-improve-postsecondary-participation-for-all-youth/>.

² Hunter Reed, Kim. “2018 LEGISLATIVE REPORT ON THE POSTSECONDARY PROGRESS AND SUCCESS OF HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATESKim.” Colorado Department of Higher Education. Colorado Department of Higher Education, 2018.
<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED586436.pdf>.

³ Information and Resources, Foster Care Education: Higher Education § (2016).

⁴ “Flattening the College Curve: Lessons Learned from Foster Care to Improve Postsecondary Participation for All Youth.” Colorado Evaluation and Action Lab. Colorado Lab, September 29, 2020.

<https://coloradolab.org/documents/flattening-the-college-curve-lessons-learned-from-foster-care-to-improve-postsecondary-participation-for-all-youth/>.

⁵ Ibid.

“available on a first-come, first-serve basis.”⁶ For example, the average cost of Colorado State University, including room and board and other living expenses, is \$16,793 per year after financial aid, much more than the federal ETV program that only provides up to \$5,000 of financial aid.⁷ Because of the limited nature of the federal ETV program, the scope and access of this initiative also prove to be a major barrier to foster youth seeking further education. Despite the implementation of the federal ETV program in 2002, the gap in educational attainment for foster youth remains, as demonstrated by the aforementioned low enrollment rate of Colorado foster youth in higher education.

Solutions

(1) Education Waiver Programs Help Foster Care Youth– Both obstacles that foster youth face when pursuing higher education are addressable beyond the limitations of the federal ETV program. 23 states have created a state-based education waiver program for youth in foster care to supplement the gaps in the national ETV program, with targeted tuition waiver programs and foster care support liaison mandates for public universities, but Colorado has not passed equivalent legislation.⁸ Texas is an example of a state that has addressed the financial obstacle: public universities in Texas must waive all tuition and fees for foster youth who qualify, without reimbursement from the state, which adds up to a cost of about \$22.2 million as of 2018.⁹ 6,037 foster youth used the waiver program in 2018, for some context.¹⁰ In a study conducted by Texas public universities in 2018 regarding graduation rates of foster care youth who entered college in 2008, 22.2% of foster care youth who used the waiver graduated in 6 years, compared to the 13.2% graduation rate of foster care youth who did not use the waiver.¹¹ Through its 20 year history, Texas’ ETV program shows that waiving tuition and other fees leads to a higher rate of college enrollment and graduation for foster youth.¹²

(2) Foster Care Students in College Need Counselors – Colorado needs a state-based program to comprehensively support foster care youth in pursuing higher education. In

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ CollegeSimply. “Colorado State University Fort Collins - Net Price, Tuition, Cost to Attend, Financial Aid and Student Loans.” CollegeSimply. Accessed August 10, 2021.
<https://www.collegesimply.com/colleges/colorado/colorado-state-university-fort-collins/price/>.

⁸ Hernandez, Liliana, and Angelique Day. States Use Tuition Waivers to Support College Enrollment of Youth in Foster Care. *Youth Today*, June 26, 2019.
<https://youthtoday.org/2019/06/states-support-college-enrollment-of-youth-in-foster-care-with-tuition-waivers/>.

⁹ Grubbs, Spencer. “Helping Foster Youths in Higher Education.” Helping Foster Youths in Higher Education, April 2020.
<https://comptroller.texas.gov/economy/fiscal-notes/2020/apr/education.php>.

¹⁰ Grubbs. “Helping Foster Youths in Higher Education.”

¹¹ Watt, Toni & Faulkner, Monica & Bustillos, Sheila & Madden, Elissa. (2019). Foster Care Alumni and Higher Education: A Descriptive Study of Post-secondary Achievements of Foster Youth in Texas. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*. 36. 1-10. 10.1007/s10560-018-0569-x.

¹² Watt, Toni & Faulkner, Monica & Bustillos, Sheila & Madden, Elissa. (2019). Foster Care Alumni and Higher Education: A Descriptive Study of Post-secondary Achievements of Foster Youth in Texas. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*. 36. 1-10. 10.1007/s10560-018-0569-x.

addition to following the successful model of other state-run financial support for foster care youth pursuing higher education, Colorado's tuition waivers would also include educational mentoring to increase likelihood of student success in postsecondary education. Public universities across Colorado would be mandated to have a counselor specifically to support foster care youth as part of a Colorado-run foster care youth in higher education support system. A similar program was implemented again, in Texas, in 2015. Dr. Javier Flores, the Foster Care Liaison at Angelo State University, describes his role as overseeing "departments across the university to develop processes, practices and programs leading to an increase in enrollment, retention and ultimately graduation rates." A consensus among the approximate 117 Foster Care Liaisons in Texas at public universities is that their services provide qualitative support to foster care youth as well as fiscal help. The combination of financial aid and emotional guidance may lead to higher enrollment and graduation rates for foster care youth in Colorado, as well. The Colorado Youth Advisory Council believes this practical and empathetic approach will lead to higher enrollment in higher education from foster youth and higher graduation rates – two future statistics that the foster care youth of Colorado deserve to be a part of their story.